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**Sea-based JSOTFs: Considerations for the Operational Planner**

**by**

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**A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.**

**The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.**

**Signature: \_\_\_\_\_**

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### **Paper Abstract**

Future joint special operations task forces (JSOTFs) are not likely to exist merely as an adjunct to conventional units, but instead may be the supported force for major portions of a Geographic Combatant Commander's (GCC) theater campaign plan. Additionally, a myriad of geostrategic constraints may dictate this force operate from vessels serving as afloat forward staging bases (AFSBs). While the individual concept(s) of special operations-focused campaigns and that of seabasing are not new, combining these two is a marked departure from previous maritime actions. This paper will discuss some of the operational level advantages and challenges of this novel construct and will proffer suggestions regarding how current doctrine might be adapted to address them.

## INTRODUCTION

Based on U.S. policymakers' demonstrated reluctance to commit conventional forces towards emerging low intensity conflicts in the wake of Iraq and Afghanistan, it may be inferred that future national security dilemmas will undoubtedly call for the unique capabilities offered by Special Operations Forces (SOF). The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review reinforces this, stating: "U.S. Special Operations Forces play a central role...increasingly maintaining persistent forward presence to prevent crises in addition to serving as a crisis response and contingency force."<sup>1</sup> Although in recent years their innate utility has often been overshadowed when employed alongside a large conventional force, SOF are task-organized and specifically suited for operations conducted during Phase 0 and Phase 1 of a conflict.<sup>2</sup> This utility is echoed by United States Special Operations Command's (USSOCOM) 2013 posture statement that highlights "forward-based SOF...can achieve these strategic ends with a small footprint, while not constituting an irreversible foreign policy decision."<sup>3</sup> While the ability to forward-deploy SOF has often been a foregone conclusion due to widespread international support for United States' military action in the aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, this era is drawing to a close. As pro-American sentiment has begun to wane, so has the great latitude once enjoyed by the U.S. in establishing operating locations across the globe. Future missions may warrant a persistent

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review 2014*, accessed 1 Mar 2014, [http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2014/0314\\_sdr/qdr.aspx](http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2014/0314_sdr/qdr.aspx), 37

<sup>2</sup> The terms "Phase 0" and "Phase 1" allude to the six-phase model of Joint Operation planning derived from Joint Publication 5-0. Phase 0 (Shape) refers to Joint and multinational operations—inclusive of normal and routine military activities—and various interagency activities that are performed to dissuade or deter potential adversaries and to assure or solidify relationships with friends and allies. Phase 1 (Deter) refers to activities that deter undesirable adversary action by demonstrating the capabilities and resolve of the joint force. It includes activities to prepare forces and set conditions for deployment and employment of forces in the event that deterrence is not successful.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Special Operations Command, "2013 Posture Statement," accessed 1 April 2014, <http://www.socom.mil/Documents/2014>.

U.S. presence without first securing a land foothold gained through bilateral agreement or forcible entry. Hence, when U.S. national security interests demand a military response but objectives might not justify a large footprint ashore, sea-based SOF may be the best military option to shape the environment and/or potentially deter escalation of a conflict.

*Background – The marriage of seabasing and special operations*

As worldwide political tolerance for hosting any size American force - special operations or otherwise - becomes ever more tenuous, it is understandable why the concept of seabasing is alluring to U.S. military planners devising future campaigns. According to a draft Joint Integrating Concept published by the Department of Defense, seabasing is defined as:

The rapid deployment, assembly, command, projection, reconstitution, and re-employment of joint combat power from the sea, while providing continuous support, sustainment, and force protection to select expeditionary joint forces without reliance on land bases within the Joint Operations Area (JOA). These capabilities expand operational maneuver options and facilitate assured access and entry from the sea.<sup>4</sup>

A more nuanced conception of what constitutes a seabase comes from the Defense Science Board, which mentions that:

A seabase is not just a ship, not just prepositioned materiel, not just helicopter assault—it represents a complex capability. One must think of a seabase as a hybrid system of systems consisting of concepts of operations, ships, forces, offensive and defensive weapons, aircraft, communications and logistics, all of which involve careful planning, coordination and exercising to operate smoothly.<sup>5</sup>

Although there is certainly no shortage of opinions on what exactly a seabase is, most of these – including those mentioned above – seem more useful to those drafting budgets, not

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, Seabasing Joint Integrating Concept, Version 1.0, accessed 1 April 2014, <http://www.dtic.mil/futurejointwarfare/jic.htm>, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Office of the Under Secretary of Defense For Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, *Defense Science Task Force on Sea Basing*, August 2003, accessed 1 April 2014, <http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/>, iv.

operational planners. For the purposes of this paper, a sea base can be any group of ships supporting an operation ashore.<sup>6</sup>

As envisioned by many of its proponents, seabasing as a method of force employment capitalizes on one of America's historic strengths - its ability to exercise sea control to dominate the maritime domain. Indeed, the entire concept of seabasing rests on the assumption that a level of sea control has been established. Sea control allows the vessels comprising the seabase and its supported forces full freedom of action throughout the maritime domain within their joint operations area. Quite simply, without sea control there is no seabase. Given that these conditions exist and seabasing is feasible, the ability to do so mitigates many of the ever-increasing operational and geopolitical challenges hampering the United States' continued ability to position men and material ashore. Hence, whether due to host nation sensitivities, operations security concerns, or a lack of necessary supporting infrastructure, SOF must now be more prepared than ever before to conduct any or all of their eleven core activities<sup>7</sup> from the sea.

### *JSOTF vs. the MAGTF*

Until SOF begin drafting their own lessons learned from executing sustained sea-based missions, the most similar construct to conducting special operations from the sea perhaps is the wealth of vetted doctrine established for amphibious operations. Although it is worth noting that the landing force of an amphibious operation can also consist of U.S. Army units,

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Rubel, "Talking About Sea Control," *US Naval War College Review* 63, no. 4 (2010), <http://www.usnwc.edu/Publications/Naval-War-College-Review/2010---Autumn.aspx>.

<sup>7</sup> According to Joint Publication 3-05, SOF are specifically organized, trained, and equipped to accomplish eleven core activities: direct action, special reconnaissance, counterproliferation of weapons of mass destruction, counterterrorism, unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, security force assistance, counterinsurgency, information operations (IO), military information support operations (MISO), and civil affairs operations.

more parallels to SOF can be drawn to the comparatively smaller size, unique equipment, and organic assets characteristic of a Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF). At first glance this may seem to suggest that using a Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) for maritime-based operations is a misallocation of resources as the presence of a Marine Special Operations Company (MSOC) within a Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) sized MAGTF grants is the designation “Special Operations Capable.”<sup>8</sup> However, should the Geographic Combatant Commander (GCC) opt to employ a sea-based JSOTF it is likely the mission calls for capabilities not resident in any other force.

Joint Publication 3-05 states “SOF require unique training and education, and may also require the development, acquisition, and employment of weapons and equipment not standard for other Armed Forces of the United States.”<sup>9</sup> Additionally, “the complex and sometimes clandestine/low visibility nature of special operations and the demanding environments in which such operations are conducted require carefully selected, highly trained and educated, and experienced warriors.”<sup>10</sup> While the portions of the United States Marine Corps under the auspices of Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC) are organized, trained, and equipped for special operations and certainly meet the above criteria, the differences between the capabilities offered by a special operations capable MAGTF and those of a JSOTF are important to highlight.

Although expert in its role as the nation’s preeminent amphibious assault force, the addition of a “SOC” designator should not imply that a given MAGTF *in toto* possesses a similar level of expertise in executing special operations as a JSOTF. Even if the ground

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<sup>8</sup> U.S. Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Amphibious Operations*, Final coordination, Joint Publication (JP) 3-02, Washington, DC: CJCS, 10 August 2009, II-8.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, Final coordination, Joint Publication (JP) 3-05, Washington, DC: CJCS, 18 August 2011. II-2.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



combat element (GCE) of a MAGTF comprised an entire Marine Special Operations Battalion (MSOB) in lieu of conventional fleet Marines, the supporting elements integral to this combined-arms team are not likewise optimized. The fundamental difference between a special operations capable MAGTF and a dedicated JSOTF is that the “uniqueness” required to reliably accomplish the special operations core activities exists throughout a JSOTF’s ground, air, maritime, and headquarters components. In a MAGTF it may only reside in the GCE. Highlighting this distinction should not be viewed as SOF chest-thumping, but merely an affirmation that the Air Combat Element, Logistics Combat Element, and Command Element of a MAGTF are task-organized to support the distinct requirements of the GCE hitting the beach. An equal level of specialization regarding special operations extends to the various enablers packaged within a JSOTF. Consequently, just as SOF are ill-equipped to accomplish an archetypal amphibious assault characterized by the establishment of a landing force onto a hostile shore,<sup>11</sup> the same logic can be applied in reverse to the MAGTF when discussing their ability to execute direct action (DA) or unconventional warfare. While the definition is admittedly nuanced, “DA differs from conventional offensive actions in the level of diplomatic or political risk, the operational techniques employed, and the degree of discriminate and precise use of force to achieve specific objectives.”<sup>12</sup> Hence, if the GCC has deemed that special operations vice amphibious capabilities are the linchpin in addressing the critical vulnerabilities of an adversary’s center of gravity in support of a specific objective, the expertise provided by a dedicated JSOTF is probably required.

#### *Platforms and employment for sea-based SOF*

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<sup>11</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Amphibious Operations*, xii.

<sup>12</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, II-5.

Although the U.S. armed services are arguably the world's best trained and most capable military of its size, certain missions require skills that are not maintained across its entire establishment – hence the need for dedicated SOF. According to Joint Publication 3-05:

SOF and their unique capabilities are particularly well suited for...complex situations because of their regional familiarity, language and cultural awareness, and understanding of the social dynamics within and among the relevant populations (i.e., tribal politics, social networks, religious influences, and customs and mores)<sup>13</sup>

Based on the assumption that U.S. security interests will increasingly center around denied or politically sensitive environments while working in concert with indigenous forces, future JSOTFs are not likely to exist merely as an adjunct to conventional units. Instead, SOF may be the supported force for major portions of a GCC's theater campaign plan. Additionally, for the myriad of geostrategic considerations stated previously, national objectives may also dictate operating for extended periods from vessels serving as afloat forward staging bases (AFSB). This notion of *sustained* maritime special operations is what differentiates the concept of seabased SOF from past action – these new efforts will be marathons, not sprints. Considering that the average insurgency lasts 13 years<sup>14</sup> as naturally would any associated counterinsurgency effort, this metaphor – while daunting – is not an exaggeration. While taken individually neither of these concepts - SOF-focused campaigns and seabasing - are especially novel, cross-pollination of the two is a marked departure from previous maritime-enabled SOF actions.

Although certain USSOCOM/USN partnerships have occurred in the past, these missions were usually limited in duration and scope - akin to the “sprint” mentioned

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<sup>13</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, IV-11.

<sup>14</sup> Walter L. Perry and John Gordon IV, *Analytic Support to Intelligence in Counterinsurgencies*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-682-OSD, 2008, 3.

previously – and utilized naval assets not as true seabases but merely as “lily pads” for short-term contingencies. The aircraft carrier USS *Kitty Hawk*’s disgorgement of its air wing to clear the deck for SOF aircraft during the opening days of Operation Enduring Freedom - while still a laudable example of joint cooperation - is a notable case of this.<sup>15</sup> More representative of what SOF may expect seabasing to look like in the future is the case of Operation PRIME CHANCE.

As part of the line of effort that took place under the auspices of Operation EARNEST WILL, from 1987-1989 PRIME CHANCE stationed U.S. Army attack helicopters and Naval Special Warfare elements on barges and a variety of surface combatants. This joint force established sea control and ensured freedom of navigation throughout the Persian Gulf, proving itself highly successful in interdicting hostile Iranian shipping.<sup>16</sup> Although conducted during USSOCOM’s infancy, this historical example remains valid as a possible template for seabasing SOF in the future. In seeking to design an effective counter to the more contemporary threat of piracy some have suggested “A mix of barges, converted commercial platforms, prepositioning vessels, and amphibious and auxiliary ships...interspersed along the coast to support coastal patrol craft, smaller boats and helicopters”<sup>17</sup> – unwittingly invoking a nearly identical construct to the PRIME CHANCE model. While anti-piracy operations would center upon maritime irregular warfare (MIW) reconstituting a similar type seabase could be equally suited - with a properly task organized

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<sup>15</sup> Robert W. Button, John Gordon IV, Dick Hoffmann, Jessie Riposo, and Peter A. Wilson, *Maritime Prepositioning Force (Future) Capability Assessment – Planned and Alternative Structures*, RAND Report MG-943-OSD (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2010), 45.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Special Operations Command, “United States Special Operations Command History 1987–2007,” accessed 1 April 2014, <http://www.socom.mil/Documents/>.

<sup>17</sup> Gordan Van Hook, “Seabasing for Counterpiracy,” *Defense News*, 26 April 2010, p. 21, quoted in Gregory J. Parker, *Seabasing Since the Cold War: Maritime Reflections of American Grand Strategy*. Accessed 1 April 2014, <http://www.brookings.edu>, 69.

force - to support unconventional warfare operations ashore.

The most germane example of how this construct could coalesce around Joint Special Operations Task Force – Philippines (JSOTF-P). As the central unit involved in the conduct of Operation Enduring Freedom – Philippines (OEF-P), the mission of JSOTF-P is to:

...support the comprehensive approach of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in their fight against terrorism in the southern Philippines. At the request of the Government of the Philippines, JSOTF-P works alongside the AFP to defeat terrorists and create the conditions necessary for peace, stability, and prosperity.<sup>18</sup>

Since its establishment in 2002, JSOTF-P has used ground, air, and maritime SOF assets to aid indigenous forces in their struggle against the terrorist group Abu Sayyaf and others.

However, political concerns have capped the number of forces that JSOTF-P can employ and thus limited their operations.<sup>19</sup> If a PRIME CHANCE-style seabase deployed in support of JSOTF-P, it could be a force-multiplier for irregular warfare on land and at sea.

As evidenced by the instances highlighted above, almost any naval vessel with berthing/planning spaces for SOF personnel and the ability to support their associated mobility assets could serve as a potential future AFSB. Although aircraft carriers and amphibious ships have previously seen use, it is increasingly likely that SOF may find themselves aboard vessels purpose-built or refitted for the role. Of note, the former amphibious ship USS *Ponce* was recently saved from the scrapyard to serve as a dedicated AFSB,<sup>20</sup> while the newly commissioned *Montford Point* class of mobile landing platforms (MLP) is specifically designed to support a landing or special operations force when the full

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<sup>18</sup> Joint Special Operations Task Force – Philippines, “Joint Special Operations Task Force – Philippines,” accessed 13 May 2014, <http://jsotf-p.blogspot.com/>.

<sup>19</sup> Molly Dunigan, Dick Hoffmann, Peter Chalk, Brian Nichiporuk, Paul DeLuca, *Characterizing and Exploring the Implications of Maritime Irregular Warfare*, RAND Report MG-1127-NAVY (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2012), 25.

<sup>20</sup> Edward H. Lundquist, “USS Ponce Afloat Forward Staging Base (AFSB) Will Provide Combat Capability for Fifth Fleet,” accessed 15 April 2014, <http://www.defensemianetwork.com/stories/uss-ponce-afloat-forward-staging-base-afsb-will-provide-combat-capability-for-fifth-fleet/>.

capabilities of an assault ship are not required.<sup>21</sup> For any who doubt that executing sustained direct action, unconventional warfare, and counterinsurgency missions from sea bases may not be just over the horizon, one need only refer to the recent keel laying of the USNS *Lewis B. Puller*. This vessel, based on the commercially designed *Alaska*-class crude oil tanker but replete with flight deck and hangar space, is “planned to be the first MLP AFSB variant, further enabling the capability to transfer vehicles and equipment at sea while meeting AFSB operational requirements...and special operations forces missions.”<sup>22</sup> In order to provide GCCs the full range of options this highly specialized naval asset might offer when laden with an equally specialized special operations force, current doctrine must be adapted to ensure operational planners are prepared to employ them.

### *Operational Considerations*

While operational planners certainly realize the value of sea-based SOF, and the respective capabilities of U.S. naval and SOF assets are unmatched, currently an operational level doctrine gap exists concerning how best to leverage the tactical competencies of both to achieve strategic objectives. This gap will begin to close if an effective command organization model is devised for seabased SOF task forces. While all military operations are highly dependent on a command organization able to provide agile C2 functions, due to the especially sensitive nature of many of their missions this need is doubly critical for SOF. According to one well-respected modern military theorist “Operational command organization is perhaps one of the most critical and the most important of all operational

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<sup>21</sup> U. S. Navy, “Fact File: Mobile Landing Platform – MLP,” accessed 1 April 2014, [http://www.navy.mil/navydata/fact\\_display.asp?cid=4600&tid=675&ct=4](http://www.navy.mil/navydata/fact_display.asp?cid=4600&tid=675&ct=4)

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Navy, “Keel Laid for Future USNS Lewis B. Puller,” accessed 15 April 2014, [http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story\\_id=77482](http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=77482)

functions. It is a framework that integrates all other theater wide functions.”<sup>23</sup> If one agrees with the assertion that effective command organization provides a decision support structure to command and control (C2) the successful application of the five other operational functions<sup>24</sup> answering questions regarding the optimal command organization for SOF-centric maritime task forces are perhaps those most pressing prior to deploying sea based SOF. This is necessary since although many previous JSOTFs have had maritime components, these have usually been comprised solely of naval special warfare assets (fast attack craft, small submersibles, etc.) and not larger vessels that would comprise and support a sea base. Although historically JSOTFs have demonstrated great expertise in exercising the joint function of command and control over dedicated SOF assets, friction often arises when the same JSOTF finds itself without the authorities needed to properly direct conventional force (CF) enablers for support. In the case of a sea basing, these enablers could range from traditional surface combatant, to an amphibious ship/MLP, or perhaps even an aircraft carrier. Hence, devising the optimal command organization for a JSOTF operating from the sea, defining what supported/supporting relationship(s) should exist between SOF and other assets, and even the seemingly mundane implied task of determining the location and staffing requirements of the joint force headquarters become issues of critical importance.

Recognizing SOF’s unique command and control requirements, current joint doctrine concerning command organization of SOF is well established. Under most circumstances, JSOTFs are formed in order to carry out special operations in support of a theater campaign and report either to the Joint Force Special Operations Component Commander (JFSOCC), or to the GCC. In some special cases JSOTFs may be under the direct operational control

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<sup>23</sup> Milan Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, (Newport, RI: U.S. Naval War College, 2009), VIII-20.

<sup>24</sup> The six joint functions are those that are common to joint operations at all levels of war—specifically command and control (C2), intelligence, fires, movement and maneuver, protection, and sustainment.

(OPCON) of the Commander of United States Special Operations Command (CDRUSSOCOM). Supplying JSOTFs with capabilities not available organically are provided via support relationships the overall Joint Force Commander may establish between the JFSOCC and their complementary joint land, air, and maritime component commanders.

Future special operations mounted from afloat may best attain unity of effort through unity of command. Eliminating the dual chains of command required if the SOF component were forced to report to the JFSOCC while maritime component reported to the JFMCC could achieve this. If the command organization were devised as a standalone Joint Task Force, operational level conflicts between components could be resolved by the CJTF, instead of the GCC. Assuming sea control has already been established and the force will operate in a permissive maritime environment, SOF should serve as the lead for the Joint Task Force. This arrangement, while non-conventional, is supported by guidance from joint doctrine that;

In some cases, a C2 construct based on *SO expertise and influence* may be better suited to the overall conduct of an operation (i.e., superiority in the aggregate of applicable capabilities, experience, specialized equipment, and knowledge of and relationships with relevant populations). In this case the JTF headquarters should be built around a core SO staff.<sup>25</sup>

Below the Commander of the Joint Task Force, consideration should be given to adapting the command organization structure of amphibious operations to fit the unique requirements of a force conducting special operations. In this case, the overall joint force commander could delegate responsibilities to the commander, amphibious task force (CATF) and the commander, Joint Special Operations Task Force. The support relationship between these two commanders would shift depending on the current mission or phase of operations. Again, operating under the assumption that the maritime environment is permissive, the

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<sup>25</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, xii.

JSOTF commander would be the supported commander for most tasks, but certain triggers (manifestation of a credible threat to the maritime component, a change in environmental conditions or sea-state affecting naval operations, etc.) agreed upon in planning could cause the relationship to change. In all cases, allowing the entire force to maintain freedom of action would be the overarching concern.

Considering there is currently a void of institutional knowledge throughout USSOCOM for conducting sustained maritime operations, and the likelihood of conducting these operations is growing, the lack of published guidance addressing this void is especially problematic. In the entirety of its over 100 pages, Joint Publication 3-05 - *Special Operations* - devotes only one paragraph to maritime support of SOF. By merely stating “Maritime support includes fire support, **seabasing operations** [emphasis added], deception, and deterrence”<sup>26</sup> and that “additionally, the commander, amphibious task force and the commander, landing force, may also provide amphibious support for the MARSOF and other SOF units,”<sup>27</sup> the capstone special operations planning document seemingly takes for granted that any SOF mission from afloat will be nested within, or secondary to, a larger naval or amphibious operation. Complementary guidance found within Joint Publication 3-32 - *Command and Control of Joint Maritime Operations* - is even more cursory. This manual only mentions, “Seabasing of SOF encompasses a wide spectrum of activities” with the somewhat haphazard qualifier that “Naval special warfare (NSW) forces to include NSW combatant craft have the capability to rendezvous with ships at sea via parachute.”<sup>28</sup> This lack of detailed discussion in existing doctrine is undoubtedly an obstacle for those tasked

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<sup>26</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, IV-11.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Command and Control for Joint Maritime Operations*, Final coordination, Joint Publication (JP) 3-32, Washington, DC: CJCS, 7 August 2013, IV-27.



with writing operational plans concerning maritime enabled SOF. This dearth of doctrinal guidance is somewhat understandable since this method of SOF employment remains in its infancy, but if nothing else should serve as an impetus to exercise and validate the concept of seabased SOF in preparation for eventual employment.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Despite this growing incentive to seabase SOF during sustained operations, and only-increasing capacity to do so, current doctrine does not begin to address the time-space-force benefits offered - and challenges presented - by this mode of employment. Although special operations forces might argue that their vaunted penchant for adaptability will overcome any unforeseen friction that may occur, that characteristic trait can only carry them so far. When equipment not designed to withstand ocean spray malfunctions and replacements can only be delivered via commercial freight, or it is discovered that critical intelligence information cannot be processed using a shipboard network, a lack of pre-planning for these contingencies may result in mission failure. While individually trivial, these issues are representative of an almost endless amount of factors that must be considered before launching on missions that are often of national importance.

The need to re-examine previously successful doctrine for use afloat does not apply solely to JSOTFs formed around land-centric SOF units such as the U.S. Army's Special Forces groups and Ranger battalions, but also to those under the purview of Naval Special Warfare Command (NAVSPECWARCOM) and the nascent Marine Corps Special Operations Command (MARSOC). Ongoing deployments to OIF and OEF have demanded that even those SOF specifically trained and equipped for embarked operations focus on

other skill sets. During future operations when SOF missions undoubtedly use naval assets not only as a jumping-off point for follow-on tasks inland, but are continually based and sustained from the sea, the learning curve will be steep.

Since some missions an embarked JSOTF could be asked to perform mirror those occasionally accomplished by a Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF), SOF planners would be well advised to become familiar with both the joint- and USMC-specific guidance governing these operations. While a special operations capable MAGTF could be a good, but not the best option for a GCC, a concept offering a plug-and-play capability that exceeds the special operations capability of a MAGTF should be standardized in joint doctrine and rehearsed. Despite the inherent differences of these two forces discussed previously, in lieu of other guidance Joint Publication 3-02, *Amphibious Operations*, is a good initial reference for SOF operational planners considering how an embarked JSOTF might interface with its supporting enablers. Currently, the most needed update to joint doctrine is to devise an optimal command organization that could allow a sea-based task force to achieve synergistic effects between its special operations and maritime components. Although primarily concerned with support of a landing force, many of the doctrinal constructs for amphibious operations - specifically those surrounding the conduct of amphibious raids - remain equally valid if the supported force were a JSOTF vice MAGTF. With some modification to reinforce the differing requirements for commanding and controlling a special operations force, specifically regarding the critical requirement for a JTF commander with special operations expertise to possess OPCON of the maritime assets, *Amphibious Operations* serves as a point of departure in conceptualizing a maritime JSOTF.

## CONCLUSIONS

While the staunchest advocates of seabasing trumpet it as a panacea for the difficulties of mounting large-scale operations in regions that are increasingly sensitive to U.S. presence, the United States military has yet to actualize the concept. Although the idea of conducting actions fully independent of land based resources is certainly enticing, in these times of dwindling budgets and general unwillingness to commit U.S. forces (sea-based or otherwise) to any action, widespread seabasing may never be feasible. It is doubtful that those with grandest visions of seabasing – in which the U.S. forces operate totally independent of land infrastructure - will ever see them realized. Whether one agrees with this or not, the constantly dwindling numbers of naval shipbuilding contracts should give pause to those who envision future battles waged by joint forces fully based and sustained from the sea. While promoters of the seabasing concept may continue to proclaim its many advantages, history - at least since the Second World War - seems to support the assertion that “to put it bluntly, if land bases are necessary, they will be found or even seized.”<sup>29</sup> Some have gone so far as to argue that the very framework on which seabasing rests - namely forward presence and action from the sea - are vestigial concepts and no longer viable.<sup>30</sup> While it may be considered heresy to many naval thinkers, the notion that maritime power - at least in the forms of sea control and sea denial - may not be the optimal instrument to shape the 21<sup>st</sup> century security environment has gained ground and is worthy of debate. For maritime planners trying to distill these disparate ideas and seeking to hedge their bets, the most reasonable path is somewhere between these two extremes, and perhaps encompasses a strategy that:

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<sup>29</sup> Daniel Gouré, “The Tyranny of Forward Presence,” *Naval War College Review* LIV, no. 3 (2001).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

...mitigates risk in uncertain times...strengthens capabilities that do not rely on non-sovereign overseas basing, even while working diplomatically to maintain alliances and access to overseas bases. It would appear best to invest in a balance among SOF capabilities, long-range capabilities...and highly maneuverable and well-defended sea bases.<sup>31</sup>

When attempting to provide SOF support to a theater campaign from afloat, issues easily addressed during land-based operations become significantly more complex. Just as a robust body of knowledge has been established to solve the complicated time-space-force problems intrinsic to amphibious warfare, potential future taskings mandate a similar level of analysis must now be applied to special operations. While many liken special operations to a pick-up game and argue attempting to develop rigid guidance diminishes SOF's inherent flexibility, the intricacies of joint maritime operations demand that these issues not wait to be answered only after a crisis occurs. In order to ensure future success if and when sustained special operations are conducted from afloat, the entire SOF/maritime enterprise must begin to develop a mutual understanding of how to operationalize a sea based special operations Joint Task Force.

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<sup>31</sup> Sam J Tangredi, "SEA BASING: Concept, Issues, and Recommendations," *Naval War College Review* 64, no. 4 (2011).

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